Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Willow Ptarmigan, bird emblem of Alaska
- photo by Nigel Harland

Some Personal Field Highlights for 2015

Geraldine Harris

* On June 21 on a Friends of Box Ironbark walk in Goughs Range near Maldon we found a **Large Striped Greenhood *Pterostylis robusta***.

* While doing reconnaissance for a PipelineTrack, Barkers Creek walk, I photographed an **Emerald-lip Greenhood *Pterostylis smaragdyna***.

* On our September Field Trip in the Whipstick we found a **Leafless Currant-bush *Leptomeria aphylla.***

* On September 23 we saw some lovely examples of **Goldfields Grevillea *Grevillea dryophylla*** in full bloom along Escape Track and considering the dryness of the season there were a variety of decent specimens to be seen along the ridge further down the hill. One tiny plant we saw was a **Soft Millotia *Millotia tenuifolia.***

* On Chris's evening walk on September 30 in the Poverty Gully area, crunching through dry bush we found a number of hardy little plants and also the body of a **Brushed-tailed Phascogale** that may well have died around mid August after the annual mating frenzy – always good to see evidence of these around.

* On the October 10 Field Trip we spent a short time in Sinclair Lane Reserve on way to the exhibition of Alan Hartup's nature photos in the the beautifully restored Newstead Railway Station. I made a return visit on the following Monday evening (after a small amount of rain) to try to positively identify the pea flowers we had seen. On that visit I identified **Showy Parrot Pea *Dillwynia sericea*, Grey Parrot-pea *Dillwynia cinerascens*, Loose-flower Bush-pea *Pultenaea laxiflora***, **Common Fringe-myrtle**

Calytrix tetragona and the **Small-flowered Grevillea *Grevillea micrantha*** that I haven't seen for a number of years!

* On October 29 I spent one hour before breakfast wandering through the small triangular Reserve in White Gum Road, Barkers Creek and although there were very few things in flower and it was dry and crunchy underfoot I managed to identify 32 different species and found a nice patch of **Urn Heath *Melichrus urceolatus*.**

* On November 8 Geoff and I photographed a **Sun Moth** in the paddock off Sawmill Road, and on November 14 I saw my first **Eltham Copper Butterfly** on the training day with Julie Whitfield.

Clockwise from top left:

Pterostylis robusta

Pterostylis smaragdyna

Grevillea dryophylla

Leptomeria aphylla

Clockwise from top left:

Millotia tenuifolia

Dillwynia sericea

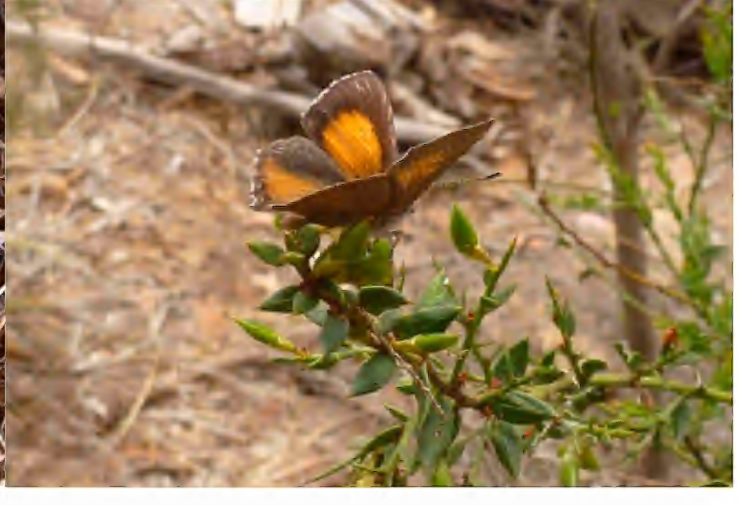
Pultenaea laxiflora

Grevillea micrantha

Eltham Copper butterfly

Sun Moth

Dillwynia cinerascens



Alaska – the frozen north (?) – Part 3

Nigel Harland

The loons or divers are a group of aquatic birds found in many parts of North America and northern Eurasia. There are five different species, three of which can be found in Anchorage. With our guide, we ventured to a lake known to have a pair of breeding Common Loons and were about to head down a track towards the lake, when right in front of us and only 30 meters away was a fully grown male moose. The moose is the largest of the deer family and has no fear of humans. If you value your life there are many things you shouldn't do. I did manage to take a few photos and we then retreated and left the Loons for later. We eventually managed to see all three species, but not within camera range.

Leaving Alaska by train, we headed north for the town of Denali, between Anchorage and Fairbanks. Denali is also the name given to the mountain in the district by the Koyukon inhabitants, which is known more colloquially as Mt McKinley. This is the highest mountain in North America and stands over 20,000 ft. Our friends from Fairbanks met us there and we arranged to take a long bus trip towards the mountain with stops along the way to find a Gyrfalcon, numerous Grizzly Bears and a Caribou – at least we were inside a bus and did not have to worry about its attitude towards the human species.

Walking around a lake in the district we came across a huge dam built by beavers. We waited a while and saw no beavers, but walking on we came across one swimming in the lake. We stopped as it swam closer and eventually was only a few meters away, a spectacular and unexpected sight.

We still had hopes of finding a Willow Ptarmigan, the bird emblem of Alaska. A long walk in likely country yielded nothing and asking Park Rangers about them suggested that recent heavy rains had ruined their breeding season, but said that a small area on the other side of the road was a remote possibility. Anne wasn't too keen because of the possibility of finding another moose, but we ventured a short way and found nothing. We were heading back and I said I would venture into the bush for a final look and as Anne turned around to acknowledge me she saw one just a short distance off the track! I crept up with my camera and got some good shots. I then ventured into the bush to get some closer shots until a female and four chicks ran off with the male – it was a terrific experience.

We then travelled by train to Fairbanks, where we were met by our friends again and it was here that I found the rather contradictory title of this series – the Frozen North. One of the days was 35 degrees Celsius and all the cold weather gear we had packed came home with us unused. We spent a very pleasant few days in the district before heading home after a really enjoyable holiday.

Strange times in Taradale – 111 years ago

Chris Timewell

Recently I came across this interesting wildlife report from the Taradale District, as reported in the 'Mount Alexander Mail' (26 March 1904, page 2). Be careful if you're planning a bushwalk out there, as you never know what other savage species you'll come across.

> *A TARADALE SENSATION Man Attacked By A Baboon.*
>
> *Mons. Stracey, well known throughout Victoria as the "Monkey King" was, during Thursday afternoon, preparing for an exhibition, which he was announced to give at Taradale in the evening, when he was ferociously attacked by one of his large baboons.*
>
> *The animal, in a state of frenzy, fastened on the man's right forearm, tearing away the flesh and tendons from the hand to the elbow, and severing the main artery.*
>
> *The sufferer, who lost a considerable quantity of blood, was driven with all speed to the surgery of Dr Main, at Malmsbury. The doctor temporarily dressed the wound, and advised the sufferer to proceed to the Kyneton Hospital, as an operation will be necessary.*
>
> *Mons. Stracey gave instructions to have the baboon shot, and this was done. The animal belongs to one of the most savage species of the monkey tribe.*

Photo Observations

Joy Weatherill - Striated Field-wren on Shrubby Glasswort, Point Lonsdale Nov 3

Joy Weatherill - male Musk Duck displaying at Lake Wendouree, Nov 12

Observations

- Two or three observations of Echidna activity were discussed
- Lynne Kelly is re-activating her web-site 'the spider blogger' as garden Orb-weavers commence activity
- Denis has seen two Shinglebacks on his property
- Geoff and Geraldine encountered a large Wombat on the road between Malmsbury and the Castlemaine turn-off the night before the meeting. The Wombat did not survive and the car was damaged. Wombats are seldom reported in the castlemaine area, but seem to be spreading
- Notes from Denis Hurley:

  October 18 - 8 Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos flying over house; Oct 20 - 8 Yellow-faced Honeyeaters on Eremophila; 21 - Pied Currawong calling east of house; 27 - pair White-eared Honeyeaters visit briefly; November 1 - sighted first Blue banded Bee on back porch; Nov 8 - first Shingleback; Nov 10 - pair Pacific Black Ducks visit - male limps badly but both can fly well. At Expedition Pass reservoir Nov 9 - four Little Pied Cormorants and Nov 11 - a lone White Ibis.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Sat December 5: **Annual Bird Count**

Fri December 11 meeting: Members night

Member's "show and tell" - share a few photos, a nature experience, a poem - be as creative as you like. And bring a plate to share for supper.

Fri February 12, 2016: Annual General Meeting

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2015
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2015 Committee

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